

Message Text

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73

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-02

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TRSE-00 OMB-01 FEA-01 INT-05 STR-01 AID-05 TAR-01

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2556

INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY QUITO

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EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: PN, PQ, PFOR

SUBJ: TORRIJOS PRESS CONFERENCES IN LIMA AND CALIF

SUMMARY: WITH THE CLOSE OF THE AYACHUCHO CEREMONIES, THE PANAMANIAN PRESS HAS GIVEN EXTENSIVE COVERAGE TO REMARKS MADE BY PANAMANIAN CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT, GENERAL OMAR TORRIJOS, ON DECEMBER 10 IN LIMA. TORRIJOS SAID THAT PANAMA WOULD HOLD OUT FOR THE RIGHT CANAL TREATY REGARDLESS OF HOW LONG IT TOOK ALTHOUGH HE THOUGHT IT COULD BE DONE BY EARLY 1975. (IN A BRIEF PRESS CONFERENCE HELD IN CALI, COLOMBIA, DECEMBER 11 HE SAID BY MID-1975.) TORRIJOS CRITICIZED THE RECENT TOLL INCREASES AND SAID THAT PANAMA COULD RUN THE CANAL EFFICIENTLY AND WITHOUT TOLL INCREASES. TORRIJOS PRAISED VENEZUELAN EFFORTS TO ASSIST OTHER LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES AND CONDEMNED TO OAS FOR NOT LIFTING SANCTIONS AGAINST CUBA OR BEING RESPONSIVE TO THE NEEDS OF ITS LATIN

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AMERICAN MEMBERS. IN CALI HE INDICATED HE FAVORED

THE US CONTINUING IN THE OAS; THEREBY SEEMINGLY TO UNDERCUT HIS OWN FOREIGN MINISTER. TORRIJOS INDICATED THAT NEGOTIATIONS TO ACQUIRE PANAMA'S BANANA PRODUCING FACILITIES WOULD BE LENGTHY. END SUMMARY

TORRIJOS'S REMARKS AT LIMA WERE GIVEN EXTENSIVE COVERAGE DECEMBER 10-12 IN THE LOCAL PRESS (SEE PANAMA 7067). THE PRESS USED VARIOUS SOURCES INCLUDING THE AP. THE HIGHLIGHTS OF HIS REMARKS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

1. CANAL NEGOTIATIONS AND OPERATIONS - TORRIJOS SAID, "WE DON'T WANT JUST ANY KIND OF A TREATY. WE ARE CONCERNED NOT WITH THE TIME IT TAKES, BUT WITH THE OBJECTIVE." EARLIER IN THE DAY HE HAD SAID, "WE EXPECT TO HAVE AN ACCEPTABLE TREATY EARLY NEXT YEAR." IN CALI, COLOMBIA DECEMBER 12, HOWEVER, HE SPOKE OF A NEW TREATY BEING READY BY MID-1975. TORRIJOS CRITICIZED THE UNITED STATES FOR RAISING THE CANAL TOLLS WITHOUT FIRST SEEKING TO REDUCE COSTS. HE SAID THAT CANAL OPERATING COSTS WERE EXCESSIVE AND THAT PANAMA HAS THE CAPABILITY OF ADMINISTERING THE CANAL WITH GREATER EFFICIENCY AND "AFFECTION" (CARINO) THAN THE U.S. HE DENIED ANY INTENTION OF RAISING TOLLS ONCE PANAMA TOOK OVER THE CANAL, SAYING THAT PANAMA DOES NOT INTEND TO PUNISH "THOSE WHO ARE SUPPORTING US". ASKED IF THE DECLARATION OF AYACUCHO (WHICH WAS SIGNED THE EVENING OF HIS LIMA PRESS CONFERENCE) TAKES UP THE CANAL QUESTION, TORRIJOS REPLIED "YES" IN THAT IT MADE REFERENCE TO THE "RESIDUAL COLONIAL PRESENCE IN LATIN AMERICA."

2. LATIN AMERICAN UNITY - PANAMA WILL ATTEND THE MEETING OF LATIN AMERICAN PRESIDENTS PLANNED IN VENEZUELA FOR 1975 AND WILL INVITE THE PRESIDENTS TO PANAMA IN 1976 IN COMMEMORATION OF THE 150 TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONGRESS OF PANAMA (WHICH HAD BEEN CALLED BY SIMON BOLIVAR). TORRIJOS SAID THAT "THESE MEETINGS ARE STRUCTURING A NEW SYSTEM FOR UNDERSTANDING, WHICH IS NOT EASY TO ACHIEVE BECAUSE OF THE ONCOMPATIBILITY OF SOME INTERESTS WITH OTHERS. NEVERTHELESS, THE CHIEF EXECUTIVES ARE STRIVING TO CREATE A MECHANISM...THAT WILL END THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ISOLATION THAT HAS MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES TO BE DOMINATED FROM ABROAD.

3. VENEZUELA - TORRIJOS, IN CONNECTION WITH THE DECEMBER 13-14 MEETING OF CENTRAL AMERICAN PRESIDENTS IN VENEZUELA, PRAISED VENEZUELA "AS THE RICH RELATIVE, THE WEALTHY BROTHER, (THAT) HAS QUICKLY REALIZED IT MUST HELP THE COUNTRIES WHICH ARE SUFFERING THE MOST FROM THE WORLD

SITUATION." HE ALSO LAUDED VENZUELA PRESIDENT CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ FOR DESIGNING "A SYSTEM FOR PROVIDING A TECHNOLOGICAL ANSWER TO OUR DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS." HE WAS REFERRING TO A PLAN BY WHICH 10,000 VENEZUELAN YOUNG PEOPLE WOULD BE TRAINED ABROAD WITH SOME 20 PERCENT OF THAT NUMBER LATER TO WORK IN OTHER LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES.

4. OAS - TORRIJOS CRITICIZED THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES FOR ITS FAILURE AT THE RECENT QUITO MEETING TO LIFT SANCTIONS AGAINST CUBA. HE SAID THAT IT SHOULD NOT BE FORGOTTEN THAT THE CUBAN PEOPLE EXIST AND THAT THE LITTLE AUTHORITY WHICH STILL REMAINS WITH THE OAS SHOULD NOT BE WASTED. IN A SOMEWHAT SURPRISING REMARK MADE AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE IN CALI DECEMBER 12 THE AP REPORTED TORRIJOS SAYING THAT HE FAVORED THE PRESENCE OF THE UNITED STATES IN THE OAS. HE EXPLAINED THIS REMARK WHICH SEEMED TO BE A DIRECT UNDERCUTTING OF HIS OWN FOREIGN MINISTER (SEE PANAMA 7013) SAYING, "LATIN AMERICA MAKES ITSELF HEARD BETTER THROUGH ITS POWERFUL BROTHER." HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE OAS "SHOULD BECOME A MORE DYNAMIC ORGANISM, ONE WHICH GIVES ANSWERS." REFERRING TO THE RIOTS OF 1964 IN WHICH PANAMANIAN STUDENTS DIED, HE CHARGED THAT "THE OAS HAS NOT EVEN ANSWERED (THE QUESTION OF) WHETHER OR NOT WE SUFFERED AGRESSION" AND "WHEN AN ORGANISM DOESN'T GIVE ANSWERS, IT IS NECESSARY TO LOOK FOR OTHERS." WHILE DENIGRATING THE OAS, TORRIJOS SEEMED TO BE PUTTING MORE EMPHASIS ON ITS REFORM THAN ITS DESTRUCTION. IN A POINTED REMINDER PANAMA NO LONGER OBSERVES THE OAS SANCTIONS, TORRIJOS STATED THAT PANAMA WAS "DRAFTING A TREATY TO SELL LUMBER TO CUBA" FROM THE DARIEN.

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5. CIA - ASKED ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE CIA IN OTHER COUNTRIES, TORRIJOS REPLIED ONLY, "IT IS EVERYWHERE. IT IS OMNIPRESENT. BETTER NOT TALK ABOUT IT."

6. BANANAS - TORRIJOS ANNOUNCED AN INTENTION TO PROCEED METHODICALLY WITH THE PRESENT NEGOTIATIONS OVER THE PURCHASE OF THE UNITED BRANDS BANANA PRODUCING AND EXPORTING FACILITIES (AND NOT TO RUSH FOR A JANUARY 1, 1975 DEADLINE). HE INDICATED THAT THE PURCHASE COULD BE COMPLETED WITHIN THREE YEARS. (SEE PANAMA 7047). IN THIS WAY, HE SAID, PANAMA COULD ALSO ACQUIRE EXPERIENCE IN MARKETING, THE MOST DIFFICULT ASPECT OF THE PROBLEM.

7 COMMENT:

(A) TORRIJOS'S REMARKS CONCERNING PANAMANIAN CAPACITY TO TAKE OVER THE CANAL OPERATION RECEIVED MUCH PLAY IN THE LOCAL PRESS. THEY WERE NO DOUBT MEANT MORE AS A STATEMENT OF AN ATTITUDE OF PUBLIC CONFIDENCE, THAN AS AN ITEM OF PRACTICAL CONCERN SINCE (1) NO TREATY IS PRESENTLY UNDER CONSIDERATION BY WHICH PANAMA WOULD OBTAIN THE LEGAL RIGHT TO ADMINISTER THE CANAL FOR MANY YEARS AND (2) PANAMANIAN OFFICIALS ARE QUITE INSISTENT ON THE TRAINING OF PANAMANIAN EXECUTIVES IN CANAL MANAGEMENT, PRECISELY SO THAT THEY WILL BE PREPARED TO TAKE OVER THE CANAL OPERATION WHEN THE TIME COMES. OF MORE IMPORTANCE WAS THE EVIDENCE THAT HE STILL PREFERS NOT TO PUSH DEADLINES.

(B) ALTHOUGH TORRIJOS CHOSE TO INTERPRET THE ANTI-COLONIAL CONTENT OF THE DECLARATION OF AYACHUCHO AS BEING THE EQUIVALENT OF DIRECT STATEMENT OF SUPPORT ON THE CANAL NEGOTIATIONS, IT IS REMARKABLE THAT THE DECLARATION NOWHERE MENTIONS THE CANAL BY NAME.

(C) TORRIJO'S REMARKS ABOUT VENEZUELA BRING TO MIND THE EXCELLENT PRESS THE MAJOR OIL EXPORTERS (INCLUDING ECUADOR) HAVE MAINTAINED IN PANAMA DESPITE THE SEVERE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS HIGH OIL PRICES HAVE CAUSED. IN FACT THE PRESS HAS CONSISTENTLY BLAMED PANAMA'S ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES ON THE WESTERN OIL COMPANIES RATHER THAN ON LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THOSE GOVERNMENTS WHICH DECREED THE PRICE INCREASES.
JORDEN

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